

Brett Neely, *Minnesota Public Radio*

(Washington) - Concerned that social programs are in the sights of Republican budget cutters, DFL Rep. Betty McCollum has proposed some cuts of her own and at least one of them has gone viral in political and media circles.

McCollum's proposed amendment would prohibit the Department of Defense from sponsoring individual NASCAR racing cars. The US Army sponsors one NASCAR car at an annual cost of \$7 million, ostensibly for recruiting purposes, according to McCollum's office.

The amendment to cut NASCAR sponsorship is part of the massive bill to fund the government's operations through the end of the current fiscal year in September.

"Corporate sponsorship of NASCAR is a waste of money and nothing more than corporate welfare," said Bill Harper, McCollum's chief of staff. "All they get is a sticker on the car and some appearances by the driver."

Harper said the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard discontinued NASCAR sponsorship several years ago, in part because it had no impact on recruiting.

The amendment has received support from the conservative group Citizens Against Government Waste, which backed it and a number of other budget-cutting amendments to the appropriations bill.

Another of McCollum's amendments would cut \$30 million worth of support for Radio and Television Marti, a US government-funded broadcaster to Cuba whose signals have been jammed by the island's Communist government for much of the station's history.

"If the Republicans want to terminate public broadcasting to Americans, then we shouldn't pay to broadcast propaganda to Cuba," said Harper, referring to GOP proposals to end support for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which gives some funding to MPR. Rep. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., has signed on as a co-sponsor for this amendment. has offered an identical

amendment.

McCollum also introduced an amendment to limit spending to \$200 million per year on "military bands, musical equipment, or musical performances." The Pentagon told McCollum's office it currently spends \$339 million annually on military bands, \$305 million of which goes to personnel costs.

"The congresswoman believes that anything in excess of \$200 million is excessive," Harper said, noting that a \$78 million program to support homeless veterans was put on the chopping block by House Republicans.

The House continues to debate amendments on the government spending bill tonight and Harper expected votes on McCollum's amendments tomorrow.